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Raison d'eath

In light of recent events, the promotion department at the *Washington Post* might consider developing an ad as follows: A picture of TWA Flight 847, with the caption: "Everyone reads *The Post*. That's why they are where they are today."

When terrorists killed a young Navy diver aboard a hijacked jetliner, they justified the murder by citing alleged CIA complicity in a March 8 car bombing in Beirut that killed 80 persons. A May 12 article in *The Post* suggested the same complicity. According to the report, President Reagan directed the CIA last year to train and support counter-terrorist units, one of which, "acting without CIA authorization, went out on a runaway mission and hired others in Lebanon" to stage the deadly strike.

The story was denied by the CIA, which said it would be used by extremists as a reason to kill Americans. Nonetheless, *The Post* detonated the bombshell at the top of Page One, banner headline and all.

Just last week, as the first (and let us hope

only) casualty of the TWA hijacking was buried, the House Select Committee on Intelligence made its findings public: "The committee's review has uncovered no evidence that any U.S. intelligence agency has encouraged or participated in any terrorist activity in Lebanon." If any evidence to the contrary had existed, House Democrats would have reported it. There was none.

Newspapers have to decide when they think the government is lying, because governments do lie. But a story concerning a matter so sensitive, with such obvious potential for serious repercussions, must meet other criteria as well. Anyone should have seen what effect such a story could have on people already disposed toward murder. But *The Washington Post* thought these considerations unimportant, though to others — the families of those still held hostage and to the family that took the sorrowful trip to Arlington last week — they were the difference between life and death.